(vi) A decision has been taken to enter into counter trade and/or commodity assistance to other countries on terms to be decided on case to case basis.

As a result of the above measures, it is expected that the offtake of foodgrains from the Central Pool will increase by 160 lakh MTs in a full year.

Lifting of control over foodgrains

*369. SHRI RAMA MUNI REDDY SIRIGIREDDY: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have decided to free foodgrains from its control;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) by when Government are going to introduce the Warehousing Receipt Act which would enable the farmers to go to a private owner of a warehouse for better price of their produce; and

(d) what are the salient features of the proposed policy?

THE MINISTER OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHANTA KUMAR): (a) and (b) The Central Government have issued an Order under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 allowing dealers to freely buy, stock, sell, transport, distribute, dispose, etc. any quantity in respect of wheat, paddy/rice, coarse grains, sugar, edible oilseeds and edible oils without requiring any license or permit therefor under any order issued under the Act. The Order took effect after thirty days from the date of its issue (15.2.2002) notwithstanding anything to the country in any Order made by a State Government before the commencement of the Order.

(c) and (d) An Expert Committee appointed by Government of India in the Ministry of Agriculture has *inter-alia* recommended to introduce a system of negotiable warehouse receipt in the country in respect of agricultural commodities for improved credit delivery,

better loan recovery and convenience in commodity management. An Inter Ministerial Task Force has been constituted on 4.7.2001 to examine the recommendation and to suggest suitable measures for its implementation. The Task Force has yet to submit its report.

Closing down of PCO/STD Booths in J&K

*370. MIRZA ABDUL RASHID: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) the number of PCO and STD booths closed down in Jammu & Kashmir due to acute militancy, recently, district-wise;

(b) how many employees have been rendered jobless and income-less in the State, district-wise;

(c) what steps the Central and State Governments propose to take for rehabilitating such jobless youths in the State where lacs of educated youth have been facing unemployment; and

(d) by when such PCO/STD booths would be revived?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN): (a) to (c) No PCO booths was ordered to be closed. Only STD and ISD services were withdrawn on security considerations from all STD/ISD/PCOs in all districts in J&K except Leh and Kargil. Even though the STD/ISD facility has been withdrawn, the local call facility and 95 level dialling facility is available to all franchised PCOs and they can dial most of the places within the State. Consequently, while the franchisees may not have been rendered jobless and income less, their earnings would have been reduced.

(d) Restoring STD/ISD in these PCOs can be considered only after the matter is reviewed by the concerned security agencies.